

Hydropower Reform Coalition Success Story

RESTORATION OF THE BEAR RIVER, IDAHO

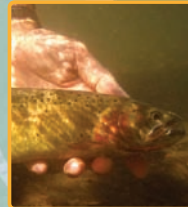
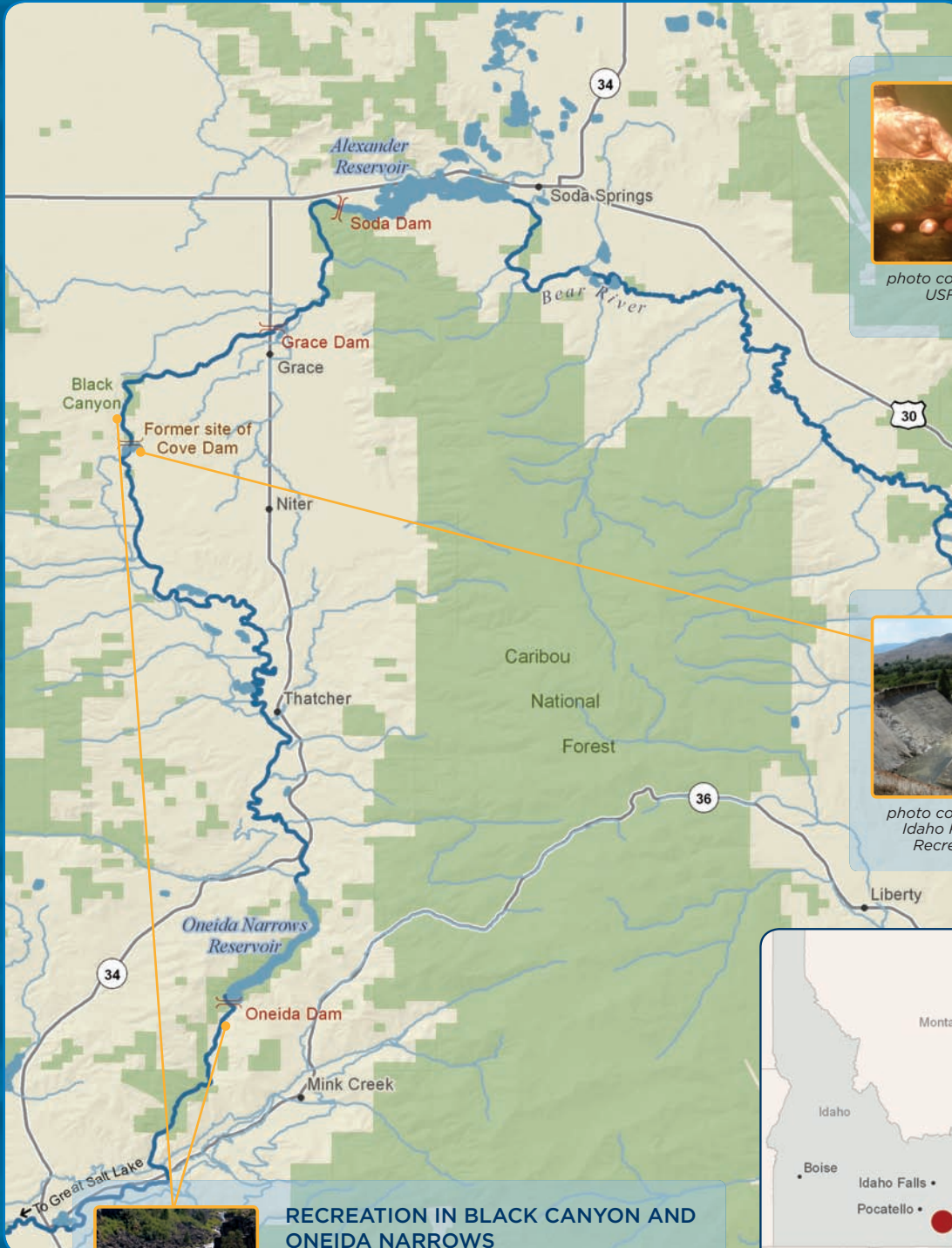


photo courtesy of USFWS

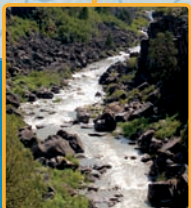
BONNEVILLE CUTTHROAT TROUT

THROUGHOUT PROJECT
Dedicating \$16 million under an extensive plan to restore habitat, preserve genetic integrity, and reconnect populations of this native Bear River fishery.



photo courtesy of Idaho Parks & Recreation

COVE DAM REMOVAL
The 80-year old Cove Dam and a mile-long flume were removed in 2006 to allow Bonneville Cutthroat Trout to move upstream into Black Canyon.



RECREATION IN BLACK CANYON AND ONEIDA NARROWS

Black Canyon, a 6-mile reach of challenging rapids, went from dry to constant fresh water, with several pulse flows released each year for recreational and ecological benefits. Flows through Oneida Narrows, the only free-flowing section of the Bear River in Idaho, were stabilized to end dramatic daily fluctuations.



BEAR RIVER PROJECT

Bear River, Idaho

The Bear River flows in a circular 500-mile path, crossing the Utah-Wyoming state line three times before flowing into Bear Lake in Idaho's southeastern corner. From Bear Lake the river arcs west and turns back south, returning to Utah and ultimately flowing into the Great Salt Lake, less than 100 miles from its headwaters.

Along the way, the river is intensely regulated. Many dams, diversions, and pipes block and pull water from the Bear. In 1907, the United States government authorized construction of the Bear River hydroelectric project. Construction took place from 1909 to 1927.

As required by law, the power company, PacifiCorp, received hydropower operating licenses from the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) for its four dams – Soda, Grace, Cove, and Oneida – built closely next to one another over 40 miles of the Bear River. This set of dams was grouped together under a single license and became known as the Bear River Project.

When PacifiCorp went to renew its license in 1999, the dams were operating with almost no environmental balance. Flows from Oneida Dam fluctuated wildly – from 250 to 3000 cubic feet per second – several times in one day. No minimum flows were required in miles of river, leaving bypassed sections of the Bear empty except for springs and accidental water from dam leakage and spillover.

Through the license renewal, a carefully balanced settlement was reached in 2002, which led to a new 30-year license granted in 2003. Under the settlement, the Bear River began its recovery. A new governing group, the Environmental Coordination Committee (ECC) was formed from settlement parties. Today, Coalition members continue to serve on the ECC in order to make smart decisions adaptively over the 30 years of the license.

Fishery resources, especially the native but severely depressed Bonneville cutthroat trout populations, were a prime target for rehabilitation. None of the dams offered any upstream passage, and with no minimum dam releases, fish crowded into areas with fresh springwater. Under the new Bear River license, extensive resources are dedicated for habitat restoration and population viability throughout the project reaches. Since 2003, the ECC has funded actions to support Bonneville cutthroat trout, such as restoring landscapes through purchasing riparian easements and managing sediment; enabling new passage on key tributaries like Cottonwood Creek; improving productive aquatic conditions by fencing livestock and redirecting flows at Kackley Springs; and sponsoring broodstock development programs at the Grace Fish Hatchery to preserve genetic integrity.

To protect treasures like the Oneida Narrows, an 11-mile gorge downstream of Oneida Dam, and Black Canyon downstream of Grace Dam, minimum stable flows were established. Before the new license, only rare spillwater flows occurred in Black Canyon, allowing vegetation to encroach into the riverbed and choke the channel. Now, several times a year, pulse flows are released in Black Canyon to flush and redistribute sediments naturally while also providing regionally-unique whitewater boating. River access, public information, and recreation facilities are now upgraded to foster community interaction with their river.

A hard look at the project's total environmental impact led to the removal of an 80-year old dam, Cove. Old dams require increasingly extensive maintenance, and Cove was no exception. Its mile-long wooden flume breached twice in 2000, leading safety engineers to shut down the powerplant. PacifiCorp examined the costs to repair the flume as well as outfit the dam with new fish passage and decided that decommissioning the facility could result in a net customer benefit. A bargain was reached: remove Cove Dam and most of the facilities in exchange for generating more power upstream at Grace Dam. Over only 3 months in fall 2006, the draining, blasting, and removal of Cove facilities took place. Today, in the place of one mile of reservoir and one mile of dried channel, runs a free-flowing river [pictured at right].

FERC PROJECT NUMBER: P-20, formerly P-2401, P-472

PROJECT OWNER: PacifiCorp

GENERATING CAPACITY: 84.5 MW

PROJECT CONSTRUCTED: 1909-1927

SETTLEMENT ACHIEVED: August 28, 2002

CURRENT LICENSE ISSUED: December 22, 2003

LICENSE EXPIRATION DATE: November 30, 2033

FEDERAL LANDS: 504 acres (Bureau of Land Management)

KEY SETTLEMENT SIGNATORIES:

- PacifiCorp (dam owner)
- Federal agencies: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; U.S. Bureau of Land Management; the National Park Service; and the U.S. Forest Service.
- Shoshone-Bannock Tribes
- State agencies: Idaho Department of Environmental Quality; Idaho Department of Fish and Game; and Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation.
- Coalition members: Idaho Rivers United; American Whitewater; Greater Yellowstone Coalition; Trout Unlimited and its state council.



SUCCESS BY THE NUMBERS:

135 affected miles from Bear Lake (ID) to Cutler Reservoir (UT), including

- Minimum and pulse flows achieved in 8 miles of bypassed reaches
- Flow stabilization through 6 miles below Oneida Dam
- Restored whitewater boating opportunities in the 6-mile long Black Canyon
- \$16 million for Bonneville Cutthroat Trout and other Bear River restoration efforts
- One dam removed to open up fish passage and enhance habitat.